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# MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS BULLETIN

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## Notes.

A reception is to be held in the Museum on the evening of October 11, on the occasion of the meeting of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

Mr. Gordon Fairchild (Harvard, 1904) is assisting in the administration of the Museum during the current month.

The number of visitors to the Museum in the week of the encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic in Boston from August 13 to 21, when free admission was granted to all its members, was 17,620.

The total number of admissions for July was 12,153; that of August was 25,754. The total number of admissions for the nine Sundays in these two months was 15,577. and 20,320 for the nine corresponding Sundays in 1903. The total number of visitors from January 1 to August 31 was 160,252 in 1904, and 207,610 in 1903.

SARAH WYMAN WHITMAN.

DIED JUNE 25, 1904.

MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL

OF THE

SCHOOL OF THE MUSEUM

1885-1904.

It may be permitted to pay tribute here to the memory of a great benefactress of the Museum, not only because Mrs. Whitman was an artist, a wise counsellor and a great citizen, but because she exercised in her life a veritable power for the humanities. Her influence resembled indeed that of the several institutions to the service of which she lent herself unsparingly; but over institutions Mrs. Whitman possessed in her personal force a unique advantage derived from exquisite spiritual endowments.

The sense of loss caused by Mrs. Whitman's death will assuredly be lasting, but there is destined to endure as her permanent memorial the elevation which was effected by her at large in the community, and privately in the lives of her friends.

## Conditional Bequests of Works of Art to Museums.

In 1875 a painting was bequeathed to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, to be "hung in a conspicuous position and good light." Although no record exists of its acceptance on this condition, it was thereafter regarded as the property of the Academy, and in 1898 was sold, in ignorance of the terms of the gift. Later, when these came to light, the Academy sought to buy back the picture, but finding the price extortionate, denied further responsibility.

In a pamphlet relating these facts and condemning this attitude, the representative of the testator has invited public attention to "the need of providing adequate legal means for securing the enforcement of conditions attached to bequests." It may be doubted whether the publicity given this case will not prove more effective to the end desired than any legislation. Every institution depending on private benefactions for its support must henceforth make plain its scrupulous regard for the conditions thereto attached or forfeit the popular confidence, which is its life.

A corresponding obligation rests upon public benefactors — to weigh adequately the probable effect of testamentary restrictions. Of the three conditions most frequently accompanying bequests of objects of art to museums, one only appears to be to the interest of either benefactor or beneficiary. This, the connecting of a donor's name with a work of art, both honors him and advantages the institution; but to prescribe that a gift shall be held in perpetuity or (if of several objects) shall be exhibited as a collection, is apt to do neither.

The condition that a gift shall be held in perpetuity imposes on a museum no less a responsibility than that of deciding whether or no a given work of art is immortal; for, unless it be thought so, no museum should agree to keep it forever. The more enlightened and responsible a museum management, the more reluctant it will be to make this hazardous affirmation, and the more frequently will works of art so conditioned be declined when otherwise they might gladly have been given an honorable place in public view. It is true that without this condition there is always the possibility that the work may be disposed of by some future board of trustees. But the higher its quality, and the broader their taste, the less is this event to be anticipated; and to provide against it signifies mistrust of one or other. Better to leave the gift to the judgment of the future, which, if it reverse that of the present, will at least preserve the name of the giver from identification with a work from which the world has grown away.

The condition of permanent ownership would in most cases be fulfilled without any testamentary restriction; but the third provision, that works bequeathed together should always be exhibited together, would, in the absence of express statement, almost invariably be violated. They would be shown apart because so shown to the best advantage. The effect of the individual pieces of a private collection will almost always be heightened in a setting arranged for them from other exhibits of a museum. Almost